

Abstract 391

TITLE: Do Heterosexual Power Dynamics Predict Use of the Female Condom?

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Promotion of the female condom (FC) has focused on the need for female-controlled protection when a sex partner resists male condom (MC) use. The FC has been advocated for women who may feel powerless in their sexual relationships, perceive little control over MC use, and fear or encounter partner objections to MC use.

METHODS: We assessed hypotheses that measures of power and control over MC use would predict use of the FC among women with main partners (aged 18-44; N=824, convenience sample). The women received baseline structured interview, an intervention promoting the FC (with MC as back up), and free barrier supplies of choice. Product supplies were replenished at each of six monthly follow up visits. Poisson regression was used to model total FC uses during follow up, adjusting for MC use during follow up, as a function of baseline reports of: her having requested MC use, his having objected, her having wanted a MC used but not asking, their prior 30-day percentage of protected acts of intercourse (when a MC was used), perceived control over MC use, perceived balance of decision making control in the relationship, fear of coercion if she refused unprotected sex, physical violence, STD history, five demographic variables, and total number of sex acts.

RESULTS: None of the power variables were significant in the model; there was a trend toward male partner dominance in decision making being associated with less use of the FC. Among this group of young women at risk of STDs, we did not find support for the hypothesis that the female condom is chosen by women who perceive little power or who experience negative partner reactions to MC use.

CONCLUSIONS: The FC may be an appealing alternative to the MC for some couples, but we found no evidence that women in the interpersonal circumstances for which it has been advocated adopt it.

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